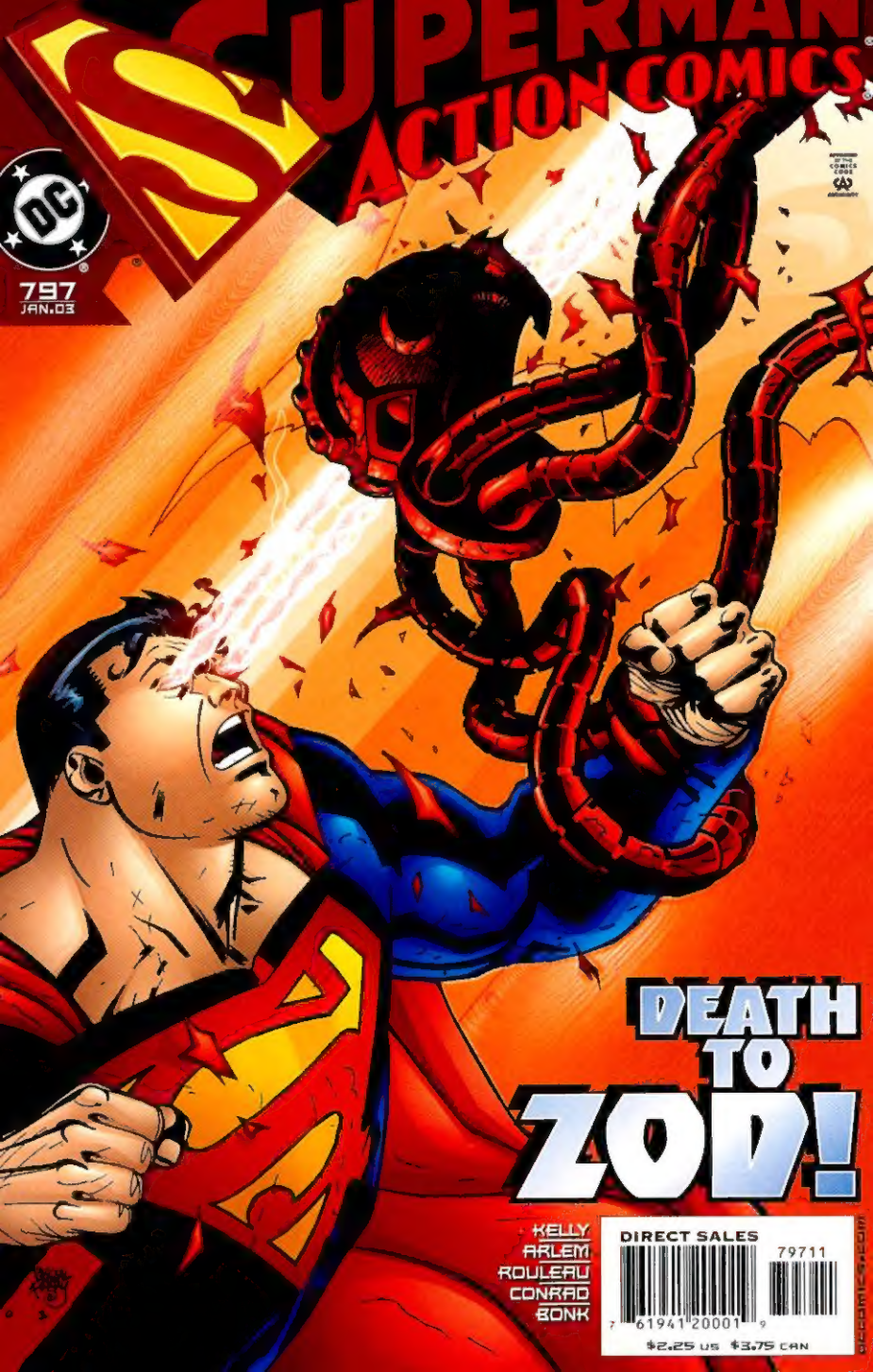
SUPERMAN
ACTION COMICS
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DEATH TO ZOD!
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WHO IS SUPERMAN?
THAT'S SORT OF A GENERAL QUESTION, ISN'T IT, I MEAN --
WHO IS SUPERMAN?

Doomed Planet Krypton. The rocket. A child. Journey across cold space. Earth. Smallville. Crash landing. The Kents. Learns TRUTH. JUSTICE and THE AMERICAN WAY. Faster than a Speeding Bullet. Stronger than a Locomotive. A Man can fly. Believe.

SUPERMAN in ACTION COMICS!

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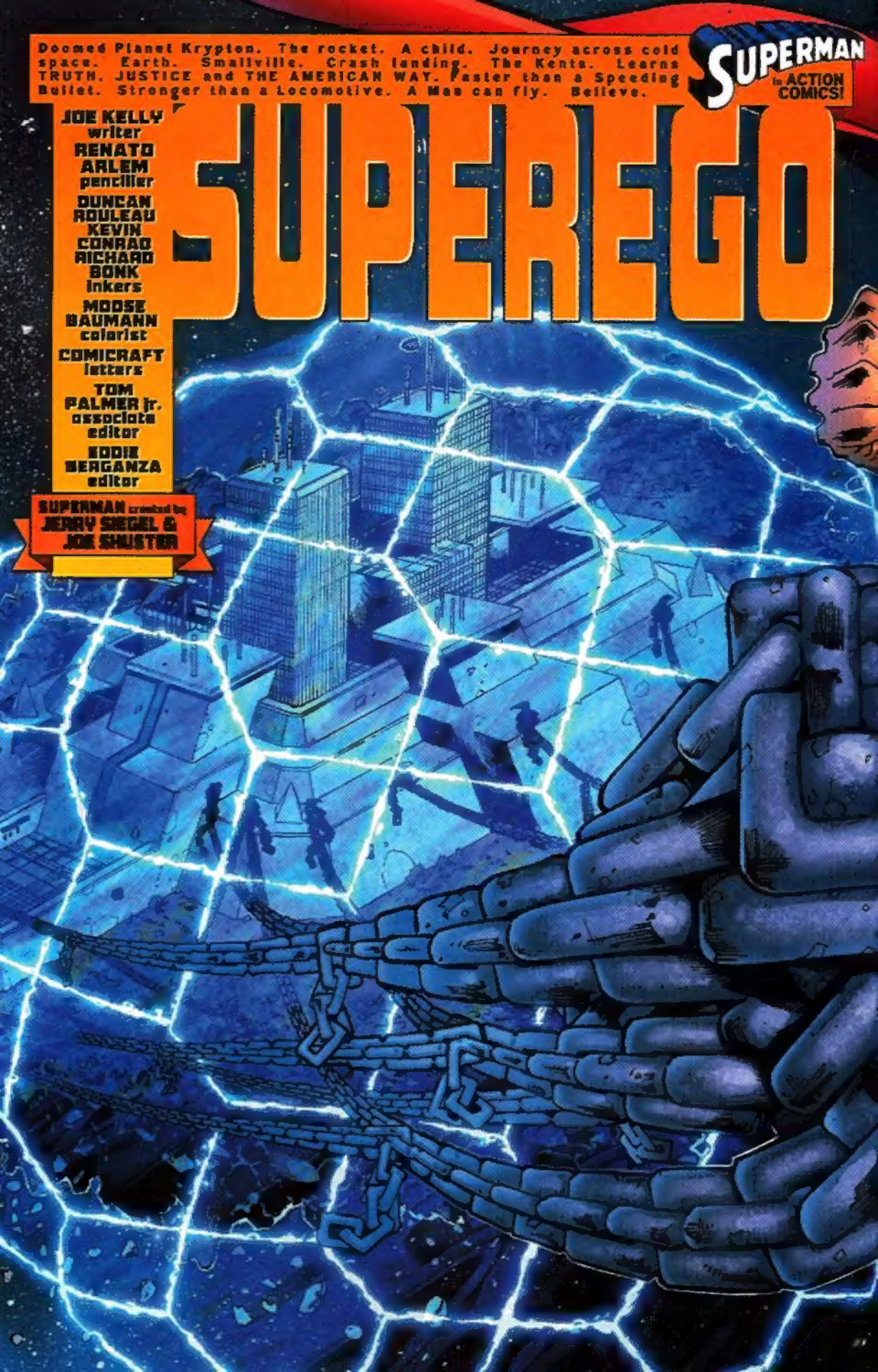
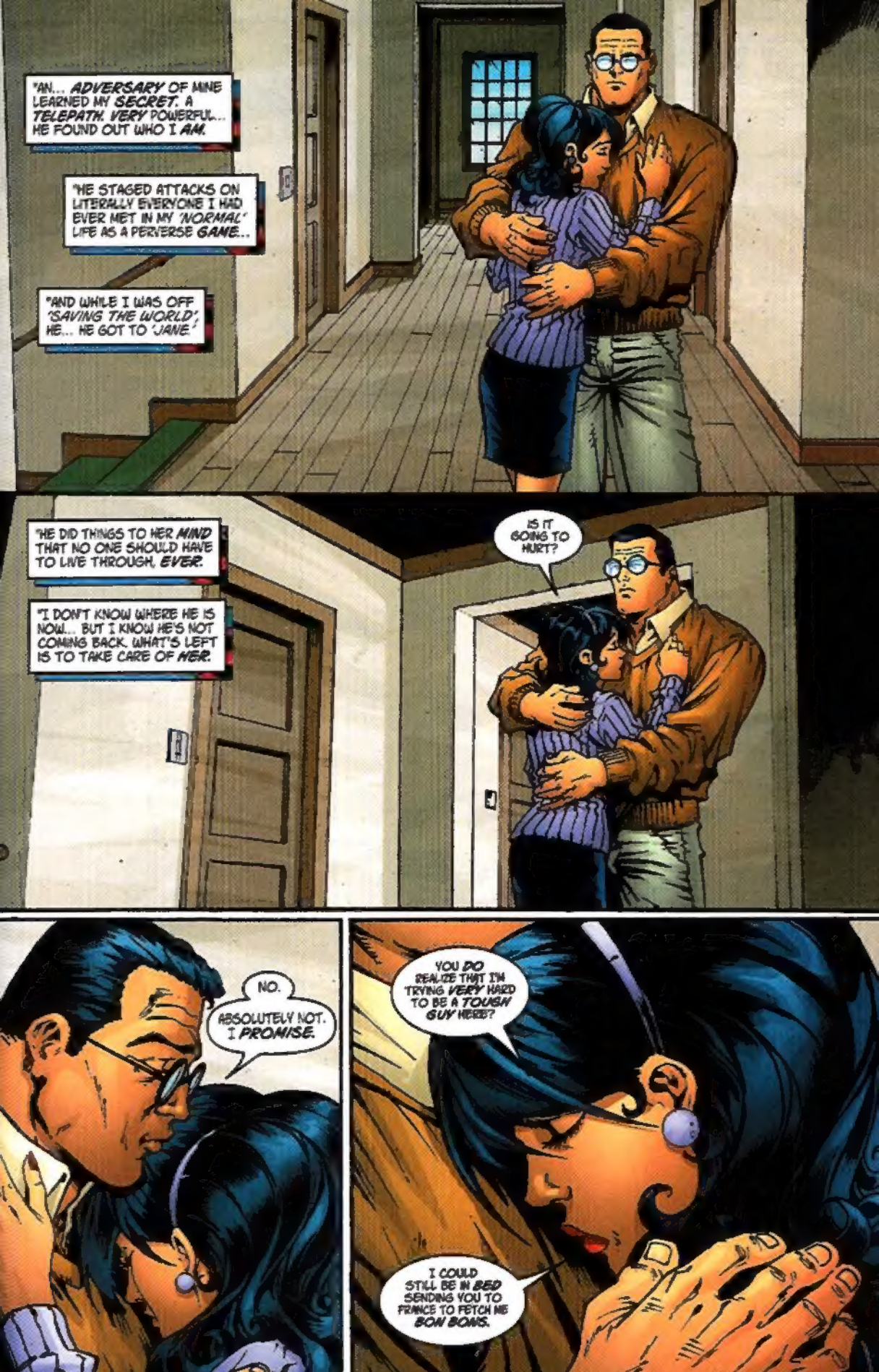


"SUPERMAN IS A HERO, WITH POWERS FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MORTAL MEN...
"SUPERMAN CAN MOVE THE EARTH.
"SUPERMAN TAKES CARE OF US.

"HE PUTS THE BAD GUYS IN JAIL."
I KNOW IT'S NOT QUITE THE SAME OL' COZY STRYKER'S ISLAND, WARDEN PIKE, BUT I CAN GUARANTEE ONE THING --
IT'S THE SAFEST PLACE OFF EARTH.
SAME TELEPORT SYSTEM WE USE IN THE JLA FOR YOUR STAFF. COMPLETELY SELF-CONTAINED AND SELF-GENERATING ENVIRONMENT.
I'D BET THE AIR UP HERE IS CLEANER THAN THAT ON EARTH.
THE SAME MAN WHO DESIGNED THE JUSTICE LEAGUE WATCHTOWER BUILT THE LIFE SUPPORT AND SHIELD SYSTEMS.
IT'S A HECK OF A PRISON. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

RIGHT... "NOTHING." JUST A FEW HUNDRED OF THE DEADLIEST METAS YOU'VE EVER DEALT WITH ALL IN ONE PLACE... HEH...
THAT AND TURNING INTO A COMET.
WARDEN, STRYKER'S WILL BE UNDER CONSTANT JLA SURVEILLANCE. WE'RE WATCHING EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS HERE...
AND YOU HAVE MY PERSONAL PROMISE THAT IF ANY PRISONER UP HERE SO MUCH AS SNEEZES AFTER LIGHTS OUT...
I'LL BE UP HERE BEFORE YOU CAN SAY "SOLITARY CONFINEMENT."
EVERYONE GET THAT?
"YOU'RE AVOIDING THE QUESTION... AGAIN."

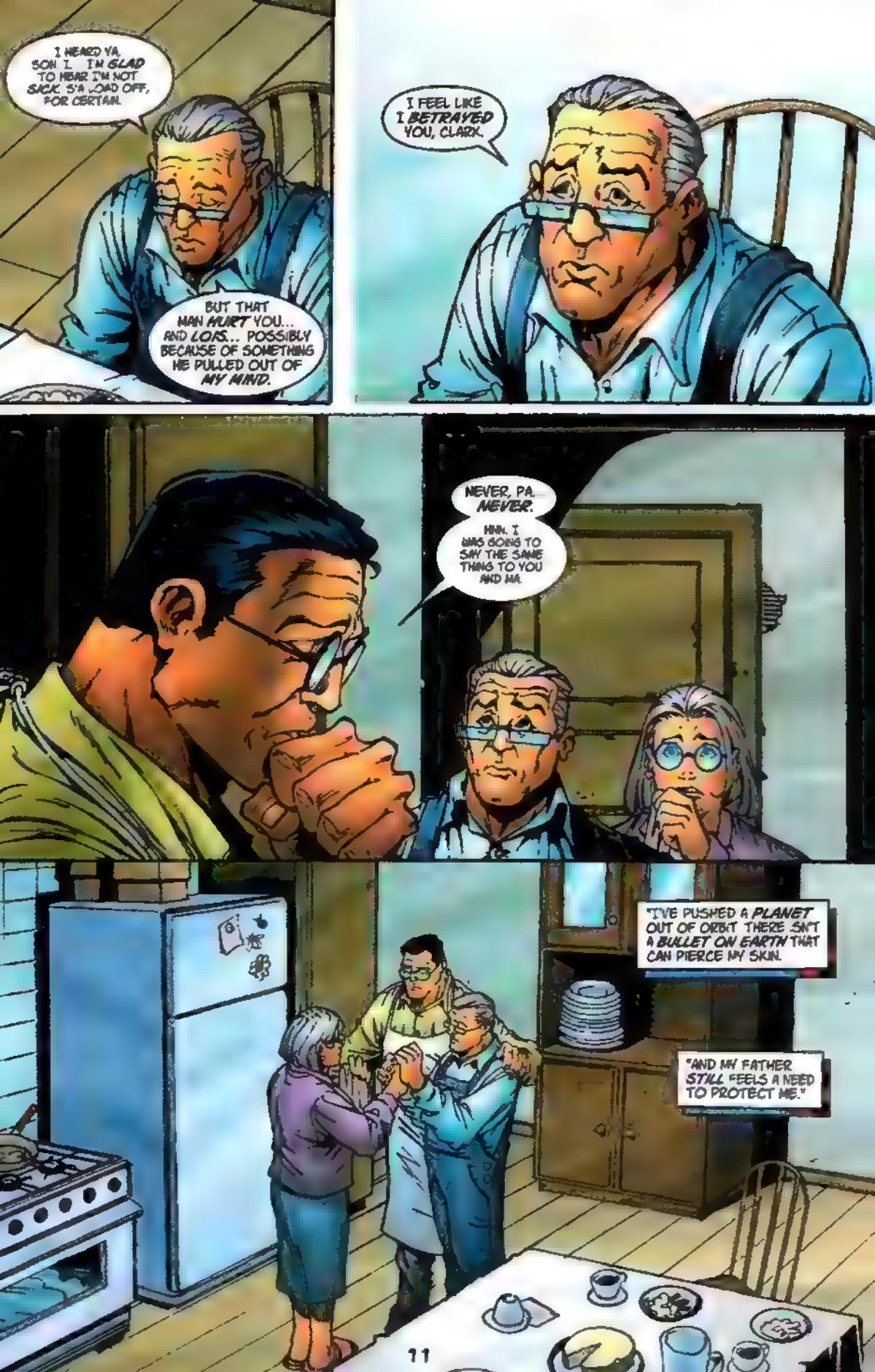
NO I'M NOT. I SAID --
I ASKED YOU WHO SUPERMAN IS. NOT WHO PEOPLE THINK SUPERMAN IS, AND CERTAINLY NOT CRIMINALS.
AND MIND THE FAN.
SIGH YOU DID, DIDN'T YOU?
FOR A MAN WHO "ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH" YOU HAVE REMARKABLE SKILL AT AVOIDING QUESTIONS.
MY SIGNIFICANT OTHER CALLS IT "SUPER-DEFLECTO-BREATH."
SHE'S ALLOWED TO MAKE JOKES. YOU DON'T PAY HER TWO-FIFTY AN HOUR TO PSYCHOANALYZE YOU.
HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT YOU WANTING TO DISCONTINUE THERAPY?
WE HAVEN'T DISCUSSED IT.
AH. THEN PERHAPS YOU'LL HUMOR ME WITH THIS EXERCISE AS WE GET AROUND TO WHY YOU THINK WE'RE THROUGH.
OKAY... SUPERMAN IS...
I AM... A... HUSBAND, WHO'S JUST BEEN THROUGH HELL.


"AN... ADVERSARY OF MINE LEARNED MY SECRET. A TELEPATH. VERY POWERFUL... HE FOUND OUT WHO I AM.
"HE STAGED ATTACKS ON LITERALLY EVERYONE I HAD EVER MET IN MY 'NORMAL' LIFE AS A PERVERSE GAME...
"AND WHILE I WAS OFF 'SAVING THE WORLD', HE... HE GOT TO 'JANE.'
"HE DID THINGS TO HER MIND THAT NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE THROUGH, EVER.
"I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS NOW... BUT I KNOW HE'S NOT COMING BACK. WHAT'S LEFT IS TO TAKE CARE OF HER.
IS IT GOING TO HURT?
NO.
ABSOLUTELY NOT. I PROMISE.
YOU DO REALIZE THAT I'M TRYING VERY HARD TO BE A TOUGH GUY HERE?
I COULD STILL BE IN BED SENDING YOU TO FRANCE TO FETCH ME BON BONS.

LOIS... WE DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS NOW... IT CAN WAIT... BUT WE HAVE TO DO IT EVENTUALLY. MANCHESTER --
DON'T SAY IT. I KNOW WHAT HE DID TO ME, CLARK. I KNOW --
OKAY... OKAY, WHENEVER YOU'RE READY. WE DON'T HAVE TO --
YOU WON'T LEAVE? NOT EVEN IF THE MOON IS GOING TO SQUASH CLEVELAND? NOT FOR A CAT STUCK ON MOUNT EVEREST?
THE ONLY PERSON WHO NEEDS ME RIGHT NOW IS MY WIFE. I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
OKAY. OKAY. ME YOU.
ME YOU TOO.
WELCOME. I'M SORRY TO BEAT YOU TO THE "KNOCK," CLARK...

I DON'T WANT THE SNICKERDOODLES TO BURN.
WHAT SORT OF MIND-SCAN WOULD IT BE WITHOUT SNICKERDOODLES?
"OUR 'MUTUAL FRIEND' KNOWS 'JANE'? INTERESTING..."
I'D LIKE TO MEET HER ONE DAY, IF YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH THAT --
HEH, I DOUBT IT. "JANE" WOULD MUCH RATHER HAVE HER MIND EXPLORED BY A MARTIAN TELEPATH THAN BE SUBJECTED TO THERAPY.
NO OFFENSE.
IF I WAS OFFENDED EVERY TIME I HEARD THAT, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE HOUSE...
THOUGH THE MARTIAN BIT IS A NEW TWIST.
I STILL HAVEN'T HEARD WHO YOU THINK SUPERMAN IS OUTSIDE OF THE CONTEXT OF OTHER PEOPLE.
HOW CAN I? THERE'S ALWAYS OTHER PEOPLE. IF IT ISN'T THE FOLKS I SERVE, IT'S MY WIFE, MY PARENTS --
OKAY, MY PARENTS... THEY WERE INVOLVED IN THE ATTACK TOO. I MEAN, THAT'S WHY I'M HERE, REALLY...
THIS "ATTACK"?
YEAH, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THIS IS ALL LEADING SOMEWHERE... I JUST NEED A LITTLE TIME... SO I CAN BE HONEST.

"YOU HAVE TWENTY OUT OF FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LEFT GO FOR IT
A TELEPATH? IN MY HEAD?
HE PROBABLY FOUND YOU RIGHT AFTER THE WAR, DAD. EXPLOITING EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON, HE PICKED THROUGH YOUR MIND --
--AND MY FRIEND THE EXPERT ASSURES ME THAT ROUGH TELEPATHIC POKING CAN LEAD TO MEMORY LOSS, ESPECIALLY IN OLDER MINDS.
FELLA IN A PICKUP. DAMN. LAST TIME I EVER HITCH.
IT'S NOT ALZHEIMER'S, MA. NOTHING MEDICAL. MY FRIEND CAN VERIFY THAT WITH A SIMPLE TEST --
--BUT I'M SURE PA'S OKAY
PA?
I SAID YOU'RE OKAY.


I HEARD YA, SON. I... I'M GLAD TO HEAR I'M NOT SICK. S'A LOAD OFF, FOR CERTAIN.
BUT THAT MAN HURT YOU... AND LOIS... POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF SOMETHING HE PULLED OUT OF MY MIND.
I FEEL LIKE I BETRAYED YOU, CLARK.
NEVER, PA. NEVER.
HMM. I WAS GOING TO SAY THE SAME THING TO YOU AND MA.
"I'VE PUSHED A PLANET OUT OF ORBIT. THERE ISN'T A BULLET ON EARTH THAT CAN PIERCE MY SKIN.
"AND MY FATHER STILL FEELS A NEED TO PROTECT ME."

I WOULD NOT BE THE MAN I AM TODAY IF NOT FOR HIM AND MY MOTHER.
IF HE HAD ANY IDEA HOW MANY TIMES HE'S SAVED MY LIFE...
...
SUPERMAN IS A MAN WHO DOES EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO DO THE RIGHT THING, ALL THE TIME...
AND SOMETIMES HE FAILS.
WHEN I DO. . IT HAUNTS ME.
DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU FAIL OFTEN?
NO . BUT WHEN I DO...
OKAY..
I'VE NEVER TOLD YOU WHY I'M SO AFRAID OF ZOD.
IT WAS ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER UNIVERSE, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT...

"A UNIVERSE OF DEATH.
"A PARALLEL EARTH, DESTROYED BY THE BLOODY RAMPAGE OF THREE KRYPTONIANS, EACH WITH POWERS THAT SURPASSED MY OWN.
"THEY MURDERED FIVE BILLION PEOPLE BY HAND.
"ZAORA, QUEX-UL..
"AND GENERAL ZOD."
"ZOD"? THE ZOD OF KOKOLISTAN?
NO... NO, THAT I CAN ASSURE YOU.

"THE WOMAN WHO WOULD BECOME SUPERGIRL HAD BROUGHT ME TO THIS PARALLEL WORLD IN HOPE THAT I COULD SOMEHOW STOP THEM...
"BUT I COULDN'T. I FAILED, AND BILLIONS DIED.
"IN THE END, IT WAS THIS POCKET UNIVERSE'S LUTHOR WHO HAD THE ANSWER ALL THE TIME
"KRYPTONITE. RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE GOLD KRYPTONITE STOLE AWAY THE POWERS OF THE THREE FOREVER. IT WAS OVER, BUT THEN
IT'S NEVER OVER WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH SOMEONE WHO WAS AS EVIL AS THIS ZOD.
"HE SWORE HE'D FIND A WAY TO REGAIN HIS POWERS AND COME BACK TO OUR UNIVERSE..
"HE SWORE HE'D KILL MORE, AND I BELIEVED HE COULD AND WOULD WITH ALL MY HEART
WHAT DID YOU DO?

GOLD KRYPTONITE STRIPS KRYPTONIANS OF THEIR POWERS.
GREEN KRYPTONITE KILLS US.
TO PUNISH THEM FOR THE MURDER OF FIVE BILLION PEOPLE IN A WORLD WHERE I WAS THE ONLY JUSTICE LEFT, AND TO PREVENT THEM FROM KILLING ANY MORE... I EXECUTED THEM.

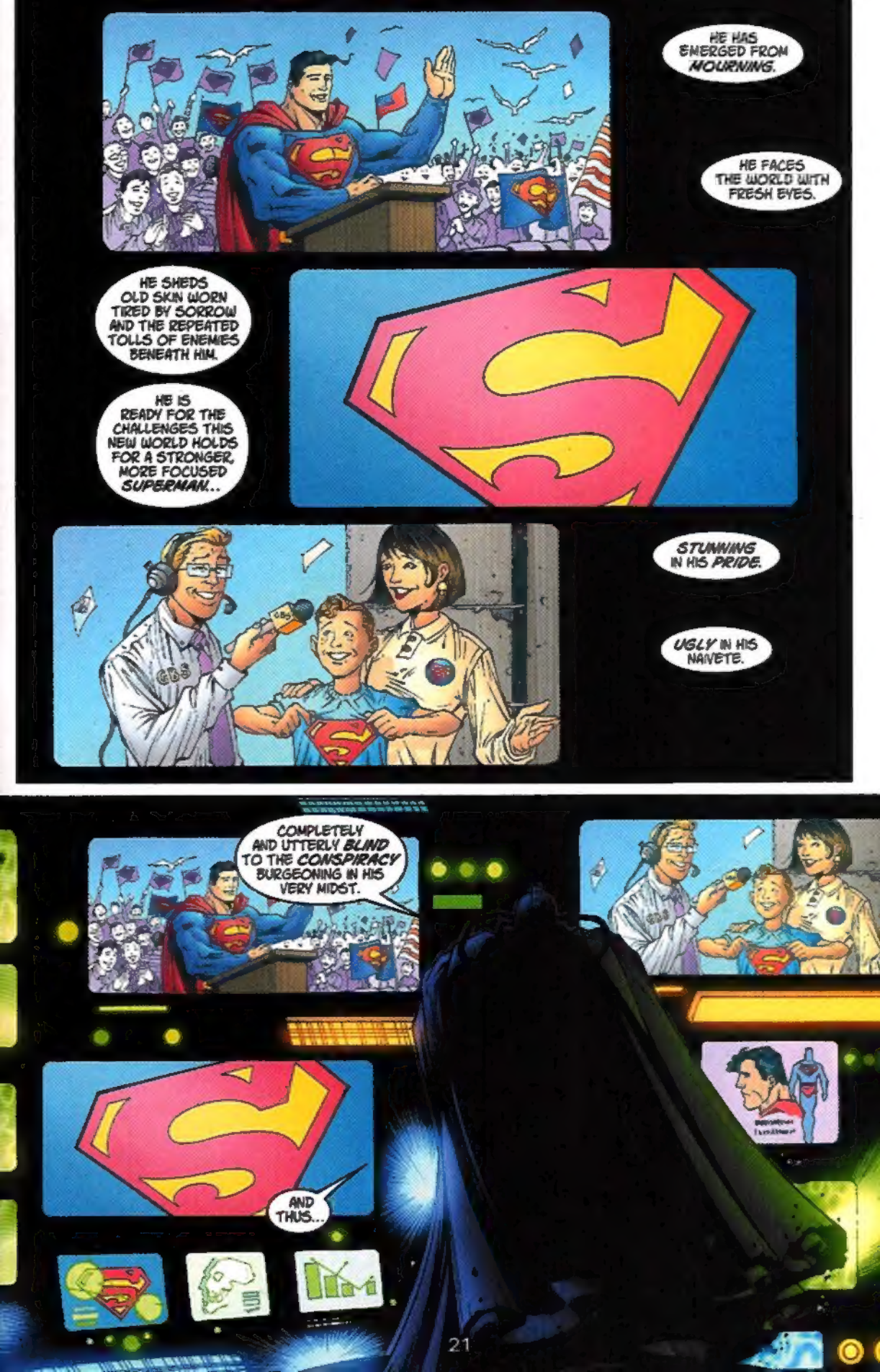
I HAVEN'T... HMMMM... I HAVEN'T TOLD ANYONE THAT FOR A VERY LONG TIME.
IT'S HARD TO TALK ABOUT
RIGHT. I'M SORRY, I -- RIGHT
HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU--?
YOU HAD TO DO IT! YOU SAID SO YOURSELF.
YOU DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.
I'M NOT SO SURE THAT'S TRUE.

IT WAS A REASONABLE CHOICE, TO BE SURE, CONSIDERING WHO IT WAS, WHAT THEY WERE CAPABLE OF. AND IT WAS WAR.
PEOPLE SOMETIMES ACT DIFFERENTLY IN WAR THAN THEY MIGHT UNDER "NORMAL" CIRCUMSTANCES... BUT SINCE THAT DAY... I'VE THOUGHT UP A THOUSAND WAYS I COULD HAVE HANDLED IT ALL DIFFERENTLY... JUSTIFIED OR NOT.
I'VE CARRIED THE WEIGHT OF THAT DECISION IN MY HEART FOR A VERY VERY LONG TIME. UNTIL NOW.
"THE MAN WHO ATTACKED ME LAST MONTH PUSHED ME TO THE LIMIT. HE MADE ME THINK, AFTER ALL I'D DONE TO PROTECT STRANGERS --
"-- THAT HE TORTURED AND MURDERED MY WIFE. THAT I'D FAILED HER. THE SICK THING IS...
HE WANTED ME TO KILL HIM. TO SHOW ME I WAS NO BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE. THAT I'D MURDER IN A RAGE.
I DIDN'T WANT TO EXECUTE THOSE KRYPTONIANS...
I WANTED TO KILL MANCHESTER BLACK.
BUT I DIDN'T. I DIDN'T.
"JANE" HAD "DIED" BECAUSE OF WHO I AM AND THE WAY I TRY TO LIVE MY LIFE, AND I WASN'T GOING TO THROW THAT AWAY.
EVEN THOUGH MY HEART WAS BROKEN IN TWO... I STILL KNEW IT WASN'T THE RIGHT THING.
I DIDN'T KILL HIM. I DIDN'T BREAK.
I DIDN'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE TWICE, AND I GUESS... I DON'T KNOW. I GUESS IT WAS A SORT OF BREAKTHROUGH.

YOUR NIGHTMARES.
THEY'VE STOPPED SINCE THE "MANCHESTER INCIDENT," HAVEN'T THEY? THE ONES ABOUT YOUR KILLING OUR GENERAL ZOD?
S. FREUD
Y-YES. I WAS GOING TO GET TO THAT -- HOW DID YOU KNOW?
IN MANY CASES, DREAMS ARE THE TESTS OF OUR SUBCONSCIOUS... SKEWED TESTS, TO BE SURE, STACKED AGAINST US WITH GUILT, REGRET.
WHEN WE'RE TRULY TESTED IN REAL LIFE, AND SUCCEED... SOMETIMES, THE DREAMS CEASE.
HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE YOU TOLD ABOUT... THE OTHER ZOD?
INCLUDING YOU?
YOU.
AND HOW DOES THAT FEEL?

...
SURPRISINGLY... NICE. IT'S NICE TO GET IT OFF MY CHEST. NICE TO SHARE IT WITH YOU SPECIFICALLY, AFTER ALL THAT WE'VE DISCUSSED.
HMM. SO LET ME ASK YOU AGAIN, IN LIGHT OF WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME...
WHO IS SUPERMAN?
IS THAT TIME...?
SO IT IS.
2:00
BDEET BDEET BDEET
WELL... I GUESS THAT'S IT THEN.
FOR NOW. WE ARE FLUID CREATURES, SUPERMAN. NOT UNKNOWABLE, BUT CERTAINLY IN FLUX OFTEN ENOUGH TO KEEP THINGS INTERESTING, AS SUCH...
THERAPY IS A TRUE "NEVER-ENDING BATTLE."
THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN TO YOU, FOR THE NEXT TIME YOU NEED A LITTLE HELP...
OR IN YOUR CASE, THE WINDOW.

OOH!
THANK YOU, DOCTOR FOSTER. FOR EVERYTHING.
YOU'LL SEE ME AGAIN, I PROMISE.
I DIDN'T GET TO ANSWER THAT LAST QUESTION.
YEAH...
OH? I DIDN'T NOTICE... "DEFLECTO BREATH", WAS IT?
"SUPERMAN IS A LOT OF THINGS... A PROTECTOR. AN ALIEN. A HUSBAND. A SON... BUT AT THE BASE OF IT ALL...
"I'M HAPPY."
IF ANYONE DESERVES TO BE... IT'S YOU.
I JUST HOPE IT LASTS FOR A WHILE...


HE HAS EMERGED FROM MOURNING.
HE FACES THE WORLD WITH FRESH EYES.
HE SHEDS OLD SKIN WORN TIRED BY SORROW AND THE REPEATED TOLLS OF ENEMIES BENEATH HIM.
HE IS READY FOR THE CHALLENGES THIS NEW WORLD HOLDS FOR A STRONGER, MORE FOCUSED SUPERMAN...
STUNNING IN HIS PRIDE.
UGLY IN HIS NAIVETE.
COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY BLIND TO THE CONSPIRACY BURGEONING IN HIS VERY MIDST.
AND THUS...

THE TIME OF THE HARVEST IS AT HAND.
TIME FOR THE EAGLE TO FALL.
NEXT WEEK in SUPERMAN #169 the 4-part arc:
LOST HEARTS
(which runs through all the Superman books) begins.
Then in TWO MONTHS in ACTION #755:
The Prelude to THE HARVEST